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IN MEMORIAM
HARRISON RÓTÌMÍ ADÉNÍYÌ (1960-2026)

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The 21st of January 2026 started like a normal day. Unknown to all of us, sad news was raging towards the West African linguistic community like a wildfire in the dry season. Before long, the avalanche uprooted one of the baobab trees in the Nigerian linguistic courtyard. Professor Harrison Rótìmí Adéníyì had died at the age of 66. Prof. Adéníyì was more than a father to his three children, a husband to his devoted wife, and a grandfather to his three grandchildren. He was a guiding light to many colleagues in the field of linguistics, a mentor to his numerous students, and an inspiration to many whose lives he touched. The academic community mourns the passing of an eminent linguist whose scholarship profoundly shaped the study of Yoruba in Nigeria and across West Africa. His departure marks the loss of a scholar, a mentor, and a leader whose influence will endure for generations.

Prof. Adéníyì's scholarship in Linguistics began with a B.A, M. A. and a Master of Philosophy in General Linguistics, all from the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan (UI). I met Harrison for the first time in 1993 at UI. My new friend was unbiased with his assessment of the linguistics programme at Ibadan. He counselled that if I wanted to graduate from the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, I needed to burn the midnight oil. He was correct. That chance meeting was the beginning of a friendship that quickly spiralled into brotherhood. Harrison was teaching in the Department of African Languages, Literatures and Communication Arts, Lagos State University. I relocated to the University of Benin in September 1998 at the verge of completing my Ph.D. thesis in the University of Ibadan. Harrison's Ph.D. fieldwork eventually brought him to Benin. I hosted him in my house throughout the period of his fieldwork. He defended his thesis (*A morphology of Edo*) in 2007 under the supervision of my teacher and mentor, Prof. Francis Egbokhare.

We met regularly during the annual congresses of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN). Harrison served as the Vice President of LAN before he was elected President of the same association in 2009. He consequently became a Member of the Council of the West African Linguistic Society (WALS) in 2013, and we started criss-crossing the West African coast together. During his time as LAN President, LAN Festschrifts and the Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (JOLAN) were published regularly. He guided LAN with vision and dedication. Under his stewardship, LAN strengthened its role as a platform for advancing linguistic research and promoting the vitality of Nigeria's diverse languages. His contributions extended beyond national borders through his service in the Council of WALS, where he promoted regional collaboration and scholarly exchange. He presented his research findings at the West African Languages Congresses that were held at: Ibadan-2004, Winneba-2008, Ibadan-2013, Abomey-Calavi-2015, Winneba-2017, Abidjan-2019, Lagos-2021 and Legon-2023. It was during the Legon 2023 West African Languages Congress (WALC) that I first noticed that Harrison was unwell. His health never allowed him to attend the Dakar 2025 WALC.

Harrison was a visiting Professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Vermont, Burlington, USA, in 2011 and 2016. He also served as a visiting scholar at the Osaka University Research Institute for World Languages, Osaka, Japan, in 2010. He was a constant visiting scholar at the University of Georgia, USA, Indiana University, Bloomington and an External Evaluator/Yoruba Language Assessor for the United States Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Intensive Yoruba Group Project Abroad in 2010. In 2010, he was appointed Chairman, National Technical Committee on National Language Policy for Nigeria. He served as the Yoruba language team leader for the inter-country project to harmonize and standardize Yoruba orthographies for the West African nations of Nigeria, Togo and Benin. He was also a consultant to UNESCO on mother-tongue instructions in Nigerian elementary and high schools. He served as a consultant to the Lagos State House of Assembly on the Use of Yoruba on legislative deliberations, and also a consultant to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on Data for Education Research and Programming (DERP) in Africa

(on Nigerian languages), working with the Tangerine application. He was a member of the Governing Council, Lagos State University, from 2011 to 2014.

Prof. Adéníyì was a consistent participant in national, regional and international conferences. He led the research team that won the 2020 Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) national research fund project titled: '*Developing functional Metalanguage for the 21st century needs of Nigerian national languages*'**.** Prof. Adéníyì was a leading Nigerian linguist whose core contributions span across Yoruba language documentation, Edọ morphology, sociolinguistics, and national language policy development. He is especially recognized for his work on Yoruba dialectology, orthography standardization across West Africa, and the cultural study of naming practices. He co-edited *Ìlò Èdè àti Èdá-Èdè Yorùbá* (2005), a foundational text on Yoruba linguistics. His 2010 publication titled '*Yoruba Dialects in West Africa and Beyond*' examines Yoruba dialects across Nigeria, Benin, and Togo, highlighting linguistic similarities and differences. This study led to the inter-country project to harmonize and standardize Yoruba orthographies for Nigeria, Benin, and Togo (2010–2011). Adéníyì (2007) analyses word formation processes, inflectional and derivational morphology in Edọ. This work demonstrates the intersection of morphology and sociolinguistics, showing how Edọ speakers use morphological processes to express identity, lineage, and cultural heritage. Adéníyì and Yuka (2012) investigate clipping in Edo personal names and show how Edọ speakers manipulate morphology to create socially meaningful name forms, linking linguistic structure with cultural identity.

In his studies of diaspora connections and African languages, he compares Nigerian Yoruba and the Yoruba spoken in the Americas and Europe, showing how migration has reshaped dialectal features. His documentation of Yoruba naming traditions includes praise names and phrasal morphology in Yoruba names, and argues that Yoruba names are not lexical items, phrases or sentences but stories about the time of birth, family experiences and their worldviews. Prof. Adéníyì's study of language use in the regulated Badagry market (2008) is a sociolinguistic investigation showing how commerce and regulation shape multilingual practices, code-switching, and the dominance of certain languages in trade interactions. It highlights how Yoruba, English, Pidgin and other local tongues interact in a controlled economic space. During his tenure as the President of LAN, Adéníyì championed the use of indigenous Nigerian languages as languages of instruction in schools. This project culminated in the 2022 National Language Policy. His exploration of how language functions in different spaces also extended to the study of language in the church, where he examines the intersections of faith, culture, and communication, offering insights into the role of language in religious practice and community life. Adéníyì was a strong advocate for frameworks that recognize and preserve linguistic diversity, emphasizing the importance of language in education and national development. His scholarship bridges linguistics and culture.

Beyond his scholarly achievements, Prof. Adéníyì was admired for his character. He embodied humility, integrity, and generosity, qualities that endeared him to colleagues and students alike. As a mentor, he was tireless in his support of young scholars, offering guidance, encouragement, and inspiration. Many recall his open-door policy, his patient counsel, and his ability to nurture confidence and intellectual curiosity. His legacy is not only found in his published works but also in the countless students whose academic journeys he shaped.

Prof. Adéníyì's passing is a profound loss to the field of linguistics and to the wider academic community. His contributions will continue to resonate in scholarship, policy, and practice, while his memory will remain a beacon of dedication, mentorship, and humanity. In memory of Prof. Adéníyì, I say;

> The halls of learning fall silent,
> a guiding voice now stilled.
> Yet in the minds he nurtured,
> his wisdom endures, steadfast and clear.
>
> Scholar, leader, gentle guide,
> his presence shaped both thought and character.
> Though we grieve his passing,

we honour the light he leaves behind.

Non omnis moriar (I shall not wholly die)

Prof. Adeniyi consulted me in many decisions he took as the President of LAN. When I became the President of WALS in 2021, he constantly reminded me of outstanding issues as we prepared for WALC. We often interrogated: peculiarities of each congress, hosts, funding and the importance of prudent financial management. We gradually became inseparable at LAN and WALC events. Harrison always stopped over at the University of Benin on his numerous trips to the East or the South-South geopolitical Zones of Nigeria to see me. We collaborated to book our flights, conference housing and shared beautiful post-conference time together. During our trip to Winston-Salem State University in South Carolina, USA, it was Harrison who showed up to rescue me from a small Airport where I was stranded and take me to my hotel. He served faithfully in his church as the Deputy Shepherd. Harrison came all the way from Lagos in 2019 to witness me deliver the 228th in the Inaugural Lecture Series of the University of Benin. He was seated in the audience when I gave the Scientific Paper at the 2022 Convocation of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL). Harrison encouraged me to apply for the Fellowship of NAL and was happy when I was inducted as a Fellow in August 2024. Harrison was already preparing for his Inaugural Lecture, and we had agreed that he would apply for the Fellowship of NAL as soon as his health improved. Sadly, these dreams have ended.

When Harrison took ill, it was devastating for many of us, but we were very optimistic that he would pull through. We drew our optimism from his positive attitude to his health challenge. He assured me that he will be able to attend the Dakar 2025 WALC, which was held last October. Unfortunately, his health did not allow him to be with us in Dakar. I called him when I got back from Dakar, and we talked at length about the Congress, the new Constitution, Council and Business Meeting decisions. A few days before he passed on, I called him, but all his lines rang out. I sent messages but got no response. That did not raise a red flag to me. How naïve? I didn't suspect we were heading here.

Now that Prof. Harrison Rotimi Adéníyì is no more, part of our good world has gone with him, too. Harrison was a good man. He genuinely loved, cared and sacrificed for his family as every good man should. Linguistics was his true love, and he served humanity by promoting Yoruba, Nigerian languages and the indigenous languages of Africa. Prof. Adéníyì has run a good race. The rest of that race is now ours to complete, and we will do our best to honour Harrison's career sacrifices.

Go well, my brother.